

Whatcom County Council Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee

**COUNTY COURTHOUSE
311 Grand Avenue, Ste #105
Bellingham, WA 98225-4038
(360) 778-5010**



Committee Minutes - Draft Minutes

Wednesday, November 5, 2025

10:50 AM

Hybrid Meeting - Council Chambers

**HYBRID MEETING - MAY BEGIN EARLY - ADJOURNS BY 12:00 P.M.
(PARTICIPATE IN-PERSON, SEE REMOTE JOIN INSTRUCTIONS AT
www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil, OR CALL 360.778.5010)**

COUNCILMEMBERS

Barry Buchanan
Tyler Byrd
Jon Scanlon

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Cathy Halka, AICP, CMC

Call To Order

Committee Chair Barry Buchanan called the meeting to order at 11:04 a.m. in a hybrid meeting.

Roll Call

Present: 2 - Barry Buchanan, and Jon Scanlon

Absent: 1 - Tyler Byrd

Todd Donovan, Ben Elenbaas, Kaylee Galloway, and Mark Stremmler

Announcements

Special Presentation

1. [AB2025-739](#) Report from the Prosecuting Attorney's Office
Eric Richey, Whatcom County Prosecuting Attorney, reported and answered questions.

He and councilmembers discussed the pressure that will be created for the Prosecutor's Office when the Public Defender's caseloads are reduced and there will likely be more litigation, when that will come into balance between the two departments, that a workload study will help determine the number of staff needed to do the work in the Prosecutor's Office, and whether there are other revenue sources or cuts (besides a potential public safety tax) they could identify if they have to increase staffing in the Criminal Division.

This agenda item was REPORTED.

Committee Discussion

1. [AB2025-619](#) Discussion of the Justice Center Project with the Executive's Office, Facilities Management Division, and the Justice Center Owner's Representative
Adam Johnson, STV Project Manager, read from a presentation (on file).

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, answered why the "Base Scope" only mentions "jail" in the base program since what they promised to voters was much more than just the jail. She spoke about two core commitments to the community, which are avoiding booking restrictions, and that 50 percent of the countywide sales tax would go toward treatment and incarceration prevention services in the community, in line with the Justice Implementation Plan. Related commitments have to do with the fact that we

are building both a jail and a behavioral care center, and that we are going to ensure that there is adequate programing space for treatment services, reentry services, and those sorts of things.

Johnson continued the presentation. He answered when they anticipate that the Joint Advisory Workgroup (JAW) will be convening, and stated toward the end of November or early December. He answered what kind of outreach is going on to some of the types of businesses listed on the bottom left of page four of today's presentation, and stated they are very early in the process, so outreach in general has not started yet.

This agenda item was DISCUSSED.

2. [AB2025-773](#)

Presentation and discussion by the Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force (IPRTF) Behavioral Care Center Workgroup on facility planning

Peter Frazier, Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force (IPRTF) Co-Chair, introduced the presentation on the Behavioral Care Center (BCC) Workgroup and the process for planning for a behavioral care center.

Caleb Erickson, Sheriff's Office Chief Corrections Deputy, spoke about the participants on the Behavioral Care Center Workgroup and the timeline of key milestones and meetings since its formation.

Malora Christensen, Health and Community Services, gave an overview of the BCC workgroup's process, key considerations and priorities, and decision point pros and cons for what an effective behavioral care center might look like in Whatcom County.

Erik Sigmar, Whatcom County Prosecuting's Attorney's Office, presented on legal considerations and a behavioral care center diversion model with consensus by representatives from the judiciary, the Public Defender's Office, and the Prosecutor's Office.

Heather Flaherty, IPRTF Co-Chair, thanked everyone who participated in the workgroup and spoke about the letter from Prosecutor Richey (on file) which says that they support the offsite BCC concept on condition that the new jail adequately accommodates the same services in-custody, including but not limited to behavioral health and substance use disorder (SUD) treatment.

Councilmembers discussed the next steps for considering the workgroup's recommendation, and giving a chance for the public to weigh in before making any core decisions.

Kayla Schott-Bresler, Executive's Office, answered when they need a decision regarding on-site or off-site. She stated they will probably need it in the next few months, and spoke about needing to assemble more information first, and that they have asked STV to do a construction cost analysis that compares co-location at La Bounty, or co-location at Division with options to either do a work center reconstruction or build on a vacant site. But the project team and the group are unanimous in their recommendation for an out-of-custody model. She stated they will also be modeling capacity needs for the behavioral care center.

Scanlon stated he wants to make sure they are also looking at a cost analysis for behavioral and mental health needs in the jail, and that whatever is decided is written down.

Stark Follis, Public Defender, gave his perspective on diversion (rather than incarceration) at the point of arrest and that Whatcom County does not currently have that. It is a momentous thing and gives him optimism.

Elenbaas stated there still has to be some form of accountability, meaning if they are not in those programs, they are getting prosecuted.

This agenda item was PRESENTED AND DISCUSSED.

Items Added by Revision

There were no agenda items added by revision.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12:03 p.m.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WA

Cathy Halka, Council Clerk

Barry Buchanan, Committee Chair

Meeting Minutes prepared by Kristi Felbinger